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How midlife women establish and sustain recovery with alcohol use disorder in Australia: a participatory action research study

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Abstract

Abstract of poster that was presented at the 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, June 21-25, Bellevue, Washington.

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HOW MIDLIFE WOMEN ESTABLISH AND SUSTAIN RECOVERY WITH ALCOHOL USE DISORDER IN AUSTRALIA: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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The study, conducted between 2006 and 2013 (inclusive), explored how alcohol dependent midlife women (35 to 59 years) in Australia establish and maintain abstinent recovery. The aim of this 'Researching with Women in Recovery' (RWR) study was to identify enabling change processes through which women's midlife Alcohol Use Disorders (AUDs) became sustainable abstinent recovery, based on the women's lived experiences of a return to health and wellness. The intended outcome was to recommend women-oriented ways to improve midlife and older healthcare services, including professional training, to meet women's needs for long-term recovery and wellbeing.

The primary participants of RWR comprised 246 midlife women in abstinent recovery (with 2 to 31 years of abstinence) and 106 practitioners (with recognised qualifications in addiction care) who were working with AUDs clients. By the completion of the six Action Cycles, there were 970 participants. The data generated in four lines of inquiry, using six methods of collection (surveys, two types of interviews, email questionnaires, transdisciplinary literature reviews and direct observation), over six Action Cycles, was subjected to NVivo text analysis, as part of a planned mixed methods triangulation strategy.

The following six phases of the women's Recovery Continuum (early abstinence to long-term recovery) were identified, described in detail, and found to be instrumental in the midlife women's abstinent, autonomous and authentic recovery: 1. Distressed recovery; 2. Enacting recovery; 3. Enabling recovery; 4. I'm in recovery; 5. Complex recovery and, 6. Valued recovery.

Effective practitioners can enable the women to engage and embody the Recovery Continuum through the integration of practical healthcare, women's self-care and community care initiatives. There is a higher likelihood of women working towards flourishing with the provision of individualised recovery development and recovery support for emotional wellness, enriching relationships, purposeful wellbeing and spiritual explorations.

Women's long-term recovery and wellbeing can be sustained through recovery partnerships which change to meet the women's needs. The partnerships can include the client, expert peers, and the health, medical and social workers required to help meet an agreed Chronic illness Recovery management plan (CiRmp). The evolving plan also enables the healthcare team to continue to learn about women's self-hood, adulthood and womanhood.